

# PORTLAND PARKS AND RECREATION

## 10 REASONS

# WHY PARKS ARE IMPORTANT

People gather to share experiences, socialize and to build community bonds in common green spaces. These public commons are often the glue that holds the community together and the means to maintaining and improving future positive social interactions.

Public parks and recreation offers countless value to our citizens and to our country. As advocates and supporters of parks and recreation who live these values every day, we may sometimes take the uncounted benefits of parks and recreation for granted.

## WHY THE ROUTE 17 RECREATION PARK WILL BENEFIT PORTLAND

In 2006, the Town of Portland Planning and Zoning Commission adopted a 10- year Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). The POCD included a chapter entitled “Addressing Community Needs” where an action step was to identify additional recreational opportunities. This step was completed in July 2006, when the “Portland Park & Recreation Facility Master Plan”, prepared by LADA, P.C. Land Planners, was completed. It identified the Goodrich property as desirable for passive and active recreational uses and included schematic preliminary designs for potential on-site recreational uses.

The Town of Portland acquired a 37-acre property for the development of a new park and recreation complex after an overwhelming 118 – 13 vote at a town meeting in favor to purchasing the Goodrich Property for passive and active recreation. Following the acquisition, the Town completed a public survey and needs assessment for the park and determined the need for additional athletic fields, a skateboard park, play scape, walking trails, a pool facility and pavilion, along with the infrastructure (water wastewater, irrigation, and parking) that will support the project. Based on the public response, the Park and Recreation Commission outlined their priorities for future development and in 2013 the town initiated the master planning process of the park area.

The master planning process included a thorough site analysis as well as a robust community engagement and outreach component. Public workshops and site walks were held in order to understand how the proposed program would best fit on the site. This collaboration resulted in the development of a preferred master plan including phasing alternatives for implementation.

As a result of these steps, the preferred alternative consists of:

- Two Baseball Fields
- Two Soccer Fields
- Splash-pad
- Playground Area
- Basketball Court
- Recreation Cabin
- Walking & Hiking Trails Network

- Exercise Circuit
- Concession Stand

This park has been designed to accommodate hundreds of people at one time. It has the capacity to support large-scale regional events like baseball tournaments and cross-country track meets, perform as the town's premiere open space and gathering location for community events, and function as a vibrant neighborhood park complete with passive recreation opportunities for residents from ages 1 to 101.

Next steps include developing construction documents, followed by public bid and implementation. The following "top 10" list of park and recreation values is in no particular order; rather, it encompasses the range of why we collectively believe that public parks and recreation is an essential part of our national heritage.

1. **Public Parks provide Millions of American with the opportunity to be physically active.**

Physical activity is an essential part of an individual's efforts to stay healthy, fight obesity and prevent chronic conditions that lead to coronary disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. Having close-to-home access to places where one can recreate is one of the most important factors linking whether people will become active and stay that way.

**PORTLAND** – The NEW RECREATIONAL PARK is planned to have a .75 mile paved walking path with 8 fitness equipment. The path will be open to the public year round. The path will allow any resident to walk, jog, rollerblade, use a stroller, and even provide a safe place for younger children to learn to ride a bike. In the winter, the path can be used to snowshoe, X-Country Ski or if no snow, be outdoors walking/jogging around the path. Our ball fields, playscapes and even a possible future basketball court, will provide children a safe place to play outdoors, to exercise and prevent obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and prevent many of the disease mentioned above.

2. **Parks have true economic benefits.** Proximity to a developed state, regional or Community Park improves property value. The economic benefit of parks and recreation area are manifold, but one of the most significant is the increase in value of private land adjacent or near protected public land. The proximity of parks to residential area leads to increase value of private land, a higher tax base and ultimately many economic benefits to a community including increase local and regional revenue from heritage tourism, steady jobs, and numerous small business benefit. Parks and recreation areas are economic engines that improve the quality of life and make communities livable and desirable for business and homeowners

**PORTLAND** – The NEW RECREATIONAL PARK can potential bring economic benefit, especially for small business in Portland. First, a playscape and splash pad during the summer months, with a bathroom facility will attract young families or even grandparents watch with their grandchildren to the facility. It's not uncommon to stop for a coffee/cool drinks, an ice cream, or even snacks. Our youth league will bring in teams from other towns either through league game, relatives out of town coming to see a nephew or grandchild play, or a tournament. This will create more opportunity for people to stop and shop. Young home owner's looking to purchase a house, especially in the area of the park, as a benefit to have a safe place for their children to play or for them to exercise. Also, families moving into town from towns that have parks can come to expect those amenities to be in place.

3. **Parks provide vital green space in a fast-developing American landscape** and provide vegetative buffers to construction and development, thus reducing the effects of sprawl. More

importantly, parks and public lands also provide groundwater recharge areas, floodplain protection, natural sound barriers, storm water protection from wetland, reductions in heat island effects, and carbon uptake from abundant trees and vegetation. Parks keep our living environment healthy.

**PORTLAND** – The town had to foresight to purchase the land in 2005 for active and passive recreation. There was at one time, discussion for housing. By Purchasing the land, the green space is reserved for what it was purchased for: a long overdue Park in Town. The town currently does not have a “Park” where residents can enjoy multiple activities. Also by securing the “Park”, passive recreation area will be preserved. The areas to the North and East will be kept as open space area, with potential for hiking trails with beautiful overlooks. The area in the Southwest corner and northeast corner wetland will be preserved.

4. **Parks preserve critical wildlife habitat.** As our nation develops and our rural, agricultural and forest landscaping is being lost, open space and wildlife habitats are disappearing at an alarming rate. The connected network of local, regional, state and national parks across our country provide permanently protected wildlife habitat corridors for thousands of indigenous and migratory wildlife species. In addition, stream valley parks and community parks allow natural wildlife to coexist with people while providing enjoyment and education opportunity for children and families.

**PORTLAND** – the NEW RECREATIONAL PARK will be primarily built in the 23 acres that is currently being farmed. The other 14 acres of wooded and wetland will be mostly untouched and wildlife preserved. Potential future projects and programming can include improvements to Carr Brook and possible more aquatic life and bird watching programming in the eastern section of the park.

5. **Parks and recreation facilitate social interaction** that is critical to maintaining community cohesion and pride. Parks provide a meeting place where community member can develop social ties, and where healthy behavior is modeled and admired. People gather to share experiences, socialize and to build community binds in common green spaces. These public commons are often the glue that holds the community together and the means to maintaining and improving future positive social interactions.

**PORTLAND** – The NEW RECREATION PARK will have multiple potential for social interaction;

- a. Playscape Area and Splash Pad – This area will allow families with young children to have social interaction. It could be young parents and grandparent who take their children/grandchildren to the park to meet new or old friends. It also is a chance for young children to learn social interaction with other young children. The young “Tweens” can use the area as a safe place to play with their friends
- b. Youth Sports – Communities are more and more being bonded through their youth sports program. Young athletes and even parent develop friendships that can last a lifetime through youth sports. The facility has the potential to be a Saturday morning gathering area for Moms, Dads, and children in town. Brothers and Sisters can be playing games, younger siblings playing on the playscape and Mom and Dad enjoying either a game or catching up with friends after a long work week.
- c. Walking Path – Walking Groups, jogging groups, and Mom’s Clubs can all benefit from this .75 mile paved path around the park.

- d. Winter Activities – the Park has potential for multiple winter activities, including sledding and ice skating. Both are great social interactive activities, especially when we get cold winters and people tend to stay inside. These can promote families, adult, and event groups of teens to get out and enjoy a New England Winter.
6. **Leisure activities in parks improve moods, reduce stress and enhance a sense of wellness.** In an increasingly complex world, more and more people are placing a high value on achieving the feelings of relaxation and peacefulness that contact with nature, recreation and exposure to natural open space bring. People go to the park to get in a better mood, to reinvigorate them and to decrease the anxieties of daily life.

**PORTLAND** – The walking path, exercise equipment, and potential for hiking trails can provide year round leisure activities such as walking and hiking that can help reduce people stress and anxiety levels. We are currently planning to keep the North Hill as a meadow, its natural setting can be a perfect picnic area that is easy to access. One future potential project could be fishing along Carr Brook.

7. **Recreation programs provide organization, structure, enjoyable activities** for all ages. The diverse range of recreational programs offered by public park and recreation agencies offers all Americans the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to successfully and confidently engage in sports, dance, crafts, and other social activities. Public recreation leagues and classes offer seniors, adults and children alike the opportunity to interact with coaches and teachers who often turn into mentors and role models. Quality recreation programs facilitate safety, good sportsmanship and community participation.

**PORTLAND** – The Park can provide multiple structure activities that can benefit the residents for Portland:

- a. Children attending summer playground program that use our before and after care can attend other camps such as Baseball, Skyhawks, and Soccer Camps that can be offered on site too. Those programs can also be held at the recreation park
- b. Young Parent Groups and Moms Clubs can meet at the playground and in the summer at the splash pad. Currently they can use the playscape next to the library, but it is small and for any water access, parents and grandparents have to go out of town
- c. Walking and Running Groups can use the .75 mile path for group walks and runs. It provides a safe and social environment for the users.
- d. Birders or other naturalist can use the Northern and Eastern side of the park as a place to observe and discover the nature environment of the park.
- e. Garden Clubs can adopt an area of the park and add the beautiful landscape that the park can provide

The two programs that will benefit the most from the park being built are Soccer and Baseball. Below are the current issues the both organizations are deal with and the solution or benefits that the park would help each organization and more important the children in each organization.

**Issues:** Our current fields are aging, limited amenities on site, on leased lands, designed for multi-use, and located at multiple sites around the town. **Solution:** The two soccer fields and two little league fields will be major step forward to solve the issues above.

- a. Most of our facilities are going to require renovation updates, including our leased properties, which we do not own. All projects will cost money. If we are going to

put funds toward our facilities, it would be in the long run, cost efficient to build new fields, instead of the “Band Aid” approach.

- b. Most of all of our athletic fields have no amenities at each site. The Park would have bathrooms, play area for the young kids, a walking path for parents, a concession stand, storage for both programs and convenient parking
- c. The new park will be a step closer to moving away from the leased properties. Both partnerships have been a great asset to the town, but they are in need of possible major renovations and have limitation.
- d. When the current facilities were constructed, youth sports were one season, 3 months. Now both sports are 3 seasons, April 1 – Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>. Soccer currently does not have a HOME field. It makes sense for each field to have its premier fields be set up for three seasons. This represents estimated 600 children in Portland each season.
- e. By consolidating our baseball and soccer fields into the new park, we will be assisting our Grounds Division and parents with multiple children participating in soccer and baseball and extremely busy schedules less travel time between fields and more time a only a two to three sites.

8. **Community recreation services provide a refuge of safety for at-risk youth.** Many parents are rightfully concerned with the dangers of unstructured or unsupervised after-school activities. Community recreation programs at public park and recreation facilities provide children with a safe refuge and a place to play, which are important in reducing at-risk behavior such as drug use and gang involvement. Recreation programs led by trained leaders offer children healthy role models and give a valuable life lesson to help steer youth to a future of promise and opportunity for success.

**PORTLAND** – One of the first things we hear is “Teens have nothing to do it town” The Park provides a couple of possible solutions;

- a. The Barn could be a spring and fall after school supervised program area for children in grades 5 – 12.
  - b. A basketball court provides a safe place for older youth and teens to play and exercise
  - c. The soccer and baseball fields can be used for pickup games after school and on the weekends when not in use.
9. **Therapeutic recreation is an outlet that individuals with disabilities have** to be physically active, socially engaged and cognitively stimulated. A goal of all public recreation agencies is to provide access to all people. Public park and recreation agencies are the largest providers in American of high-quality, life-enhancing, therapeutic recreation programs and interventions. Such programs prevent the on-set of secondary conditions due to inactivity; improving physical, social, emotional and cognitive functioning; and slow the onset of regressive condition.

**PORTLAND** – People with disabilities of all ages will be able to enjoy the park. The paved walking path will allow individual to use with a walker or any type of wheel chair. The path can also assist a person who receive a serious injury and has a rehabilitation exercise program; the path provides a free area. Our exercise equipment will be open to all recommended ages, but is designed for our Baby Boomer population as well as to benefit our active seniors to stay healthy and active. Our playscape will be design to be all accessible for all children.

10. **Parks help children learn**, childhood is a holistic process, different for each individual child. Many children do not learn effectively exclusively within a classroom. They need alternative, hands-on learning environments to match their varied learning styles. Test-driven education mandates often do not emphasize children's emotional and social needs and opportunities for creativity. This limits the development of unique talents and the fulfillment of individual lives, and deprives society of practical, problem-solving intelligence. Parks and greenways can be a crucial antidote to these unhealthy trends. They can motivate young people to learn through the natural environment (which includes learning about the natural environment), bringing environmental education into the mainstream of state-mandated instructional programs. The informal learning, non-formal programs, and formal instruction associated with parks can reinforce each other, enhancing academic achievement.
- PORTLAND** – The Recreation Complex will allow children to learn and discover how to ride a bike, climb a playscape, look for a bull frog by the brook, identify trees, kick a soccer ball, throw a baseball, stay cool in the summer, and meet new friends. This park has a variety of outdoor opportunities for the youth of Portland and our tomorrow's future.